

MERIWETHER HOUSE, SMOKEHOUSE/DAIRY
Keswick
Albemarle County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1358-A

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERIWETHER HOUSE, SMOKEHOUSE/DAIRY

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- Location: On the grounds of the Meriwether House parcel, also known as Cloverfields, in Keswick, Albemarle County, Virginia.
- Present Use: The (ca. 1830-50) structure is maintained and utilized by the Barnes family as a workshop and storage area. It originally accommodated a smokehouse in one-half of the space and a well-ventilated dairy in the other.
- Historical Data: The site was settled by Nicholas Meriwether in the early eighteenth century. By 1747, Meriwether had a one-story dwelling built on the property. After Francis Kinloch Nelson married Margaret Douglas Meriwether of Cloverfields in 1845, a new house was erected on the grounds. This two-story farmhouse, constructed in 1847-48, was designed in a manner after the Greek Revival-style. Nelson, in addition to the dwelling he replaced, found "all the buildings for farming purposes wanting." If the building was standing at that time, then it is likely that the smokehouse/dairy dependency was one of those structures he thought lacking. In 1849, Nelson spent \$2500 improving Cloverfields; the smokehouse/dairy could have been constructed or upgraded at that time.¹

Architectural Description:

Exterior: The building is defined by a timber frame with a sill that sits upon a stone foundation above the earthen floor. It is clad with white painted wood siding and covered with a striated blue tin roof. The large closely spaced posts and mortise and tenon pegged joinery of the cross bracing are typical characteristics of early nineteenth-century structures of the South. Cross bracing is found at the far corners of the smokehouse room, but only on the eastern and western walls at the dairy end of the building. Instead, additional posts have been added to support the northern wall. The siding has circular saw marks and the posts sit atop an additional sill. It appears that this entire north wall, with the mysterious window, was constructed at a later date. It is possible too that the loft was added at the same time.

Beams support the loft (and walls) and continue, horizontally, across the length of the structure. For the roof structure, collar beams are lapped into

¹Edward Lay, *Architecture of Jefferson County* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

the rafters; wood planks, some partly deteriorated and some more recently replaced, lay across the rafters and reveal pieces of the tin roofing that protect the interior from the elements.

Interior: The interior space is divided into two halves by a wall that separates the smokehouse from the split-level dairy. A ladder connects the first floor of the dairy to the well lit loft space.

The entrance is on the eastern edge of the building into the dairy. Ventilation slats puncture the eastern and western walls with air and light at the cooler north end of the building. A ladder is visible a few feet ahead that leads up to the second story loft. The rafters define the ceiling from the highest point of the room down to the eastern and western wall connections with the loft floor. The north wall of the loft area is punctured by a small square window and the south wall exposes brick from the nogging.

The wall that bisects the building separates the smokehouse from the dairy. The wall itself is bisected by a door in the center. Wood posts support the span of the wall; however, the eastern portion of the wall is covered with siding on the dairy side and left exposed on the smokehouse side. The remaining portion of the wall, from above the center of the door to the western wall, is in-filled with exposed brick, known as nogging, that extends upwards to the roof.

The smokehouse room is dark and the walls are stained from black smoke produced during the smoking process. The smokehouse was used during the cooler winter months so that the heat produced would not interfere with the operations of the dairy

Condition: It is important to consider the effects of the orientation of the building to the sun. The southern and western exteriors of the building have original siding intact since the sun has kept the wood dry and strong. However, other regions of the building have not fared as well. All of the siding on the northern exterior has been replaced and a significant portion of the eastern exterior has been replaced. Hand wrought heads were clearly used to attach the old boards – whether the nails are entirely hand wrought or were both wrought and machine cut is uncertain. Wire nails affix the new siding to the posts exposed within. Siding close to the ground is rotten as is the bottom of the (patched) front door. The thresholds of both the entry doorway and the division wall doorway are worn away as well. Many additional pieces of wood – of all shapes and sizes – have been stuck in

corners and attached to existing and possibly rotten members to support the original timber frame.

Nogging is visible across the western portion of the first floor of the division wall. Many of these bricks are loose and/or in the process of being expelled from the mortar. Therefore, it is possible that the nogging may have spanned the entire wall. The nogging could have been in such bad shape that it was knocked down and, consequently, replaced with wood siding (on the dairy side of the wall) necessary to preserve this division of space.

Historian: Sarah Oehl, May 2004.

Project Information: The documentation of the Smokehouse/Dairy outbuilding on the Meriwether House property, or Cloverfields, took place as part of Louis Nelson's (2004) field methods class at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture, Department of Architectural History. Students recorded various structures through measured drawings and written description; the record the students created was dependent on their ability to read what the structure was telling them about its construction history rather than on traditional documentary research.

ADDENDUM TO:
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**ADDENDUM TO
MERIWETHER HOUSE, SMOKEHOUSE/DAIRY**

HABS No. VA-I358-A

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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This data page is an addendum to the three-page historical report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. It also serves as a correction to the proposed dates of the building, from ca. 1830-50 to before 1805.

The smokehouse/dairy outbuilding on the Meriwether plantation, commonly known as Cloverfields, is shown on the 1805 insurance policy for the property. The smokehouse/dairy likely dates to the eighteenth century. The mid nineteenth-century improvements to the property, that included the construction of the present house, could have encompassed some maintenance or upgrades to the smokehouse/dairy, but this structure pre-dates that construction campaign.